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ADDRESS BY GARRIE GIBSON, M.P.

to the

Vth SYMPOSIUM ON TIMOR OF OPORTO UNIVERSITY:

East Timor and Indonesia: Ways to Freedom, Self-Determination and Democracy

FRIDAY, 23 JULY, 1993

Mr Chairman, Distinguished Visitors and Speakers, Parliamentary Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen

I bring greetings from my colleagues in the Australian Parliamentary Group of Parliamentarians for East Timor. We were most appreciative of the invitation to attend this very important Symposium on East Timor and Indonesia and I am honoured to be here representing them this week.

Thank you to the University of Oporto for the excellent arrangements for the Conference, for their continuing commitment to the issue of freedom for East Timor; and my personal congratulations to Professor Barbedo de Magalhães, and his assistants, for their tremendous work.

I am particularly pleased to be able to share this session with Lord Eric Avebury, for this Symposium has given me the opportunity to renew my friendship with Eric.

Eric and I, along with Parliamentary representatives from Portugal, Holland and Japan, met, as a delegation, in March 1991 with then U.N. Secretary-General, Mr Javier Peres de Cuellar in New York. Eric had been successful in arranging this opportunity to press Mr Peres de

Cuellar into renewed efforts to achieve a just and peaceful resolution to the East Timor issue. The trip was a success, in that the Secretary-General did initiate renewed dialogue between Portugal and Indonesia. However, there were tragic consequences from this UN effort, as it culminated in the November 12 massacre in Dili.

I will return to these matters further in this address.

The official Australian Government position on East Timor and Indonesia, over successive administrations, started well but has degenerated into a shameful history of acquiescence and acceptance of Indonesia's brutal reign of terror.

I would like to first correct the widely-held view that the Whitlam Labor Government in 1975 gave tacit approval to the invasion of East Timor by Indonesia. That was NOT the case. When President Suharto met with Prime Minister Whitlam in Australia in September 1975, he was very clearly and firmly advised that Australia would oppose any Indonesian invasion. The Australian Government later that month moved two warships to closer proximity to East Timor as a demonstration of that view. The Whitlam Government's view was that Indonesia could achieve its aim of having East Timor incorporated into Indonesia, by peaceful means, over the longer term.

But the impetuous Generals of the Indonesian armed forces were not prepared to be patient and when Fretilin declared independence for East Timor in late November 1975, Suharto quickly sought U.S. approval

to move immediately, which was received. Australia was not consulted on this occasion.

At this time, Australia was in the throes of a major constitutional crisis. The Whitlam Government was sacked on 11 November, and the most divisive and bitter election campaign in Australia's history was being fought out.

Our only immediate reaction to the invasion was to move to evacuate Australians from the area and to issue protests.

Australia initially supported the UN resolutions calling for Indonesia to withdraw but by 1977, under the Conservative Government of Malcolm Fraser, our stance changed to one of abstention. In 1978, the Australian Government formally recognised the annexation of East Timor by Indonesia, one of the few Governments in the world to do so.

So, Australia's real shame commenced with the Fraser Government's desire to improve diplomatic relations with Indonesia, for economic purposes, as I will explain.

The international border between Indonesia and Australia had been a sticking point for many years until it had finally been resolved by agreement in the early 1970s. The only area not finalised was the boundary between Australia and East Timor. Australia had not been able to successfully negotiate with Portugal on this matter and there existed, therefore, a "gap" in our defined borders in the Timor Sea.

This "gap" frustrated efforts by oil and gas exploration companies to comprehensively search for the exact location of known oil and gas reserves under the Timor Sea.

With Indonesia's annexation of East Timor, a new opportunity arose for Australia to have the border issue resolved to enable exploration and subsequent exploitation of these lucrative natural resources. At the time, oil prices were at very high levels and the world was concerned that supplies would soon run out or that certain countries would be able to virtually hold the industrialised countries to ransom for vitally-needed oil.

When Australia approached Indonesia on the matter, it was made clear that the only way formal negotiations on the border question could occur, was for Australia to formally recognise East Timor as a legitimate part of Indonesia.

And so, regardless of the principles of our foreign policy for the previous seventy years, despite our strong support for self-determination, decolonisation and the rights of people to freedom and peace, and despite the series of resolutions of the United Nations in the General Assembly and Security Council, a body we had worked hard to establish and support and whose Charter we had helped write, Australia caved in, to be able to gain some chance at greater economic wealth and oil resources.

From that time on, successive Australian Governments have given tacit approval to Indonesia's vicious military occupation of East Timor.

We have publicly mouthed protests whenever certain serious instances of abuse of human rights occurred, but in reality it has been a period of growing military, economic, educational, cultural and political connections between our two countries.

This does not mean, however, that all members of the Government or the Parliament of Australia, or indeed the majority of Australians, have forgotten the struggle of the East Timorese people or forgiven the Indonesians for their actions.

The Australian media has particularly maintained its strong interest in East Timor and is a constant critic of Indonesia. The most recent example is the arrest, treatment, trial and sentencing of Xanana Gusmao, the resistance leader, which received extensive coverage in newspapers, television and radio.

Australia's media is a constant source of annoyance and embarrassment to the Indonesian Government as they have exposed, to the attention of the Australian public, many of the weaknesses of the Suharto administration, including corruption within the military and the constant examples of abuses of human rights which are a permanent feature of Indonesian society.

The Australian media have not forgotten or forgiven the Indonesians for the murder of five Australian journalists in East Timor in 1976 who were reporting on the military invasion. The coverage of East Timor is far more consistent and negative than for any other single area of conflict or

dispute in the world and has significantly contributed to the maintenance of the Australian public's opposition to Indonesia's rule.

The Australian branch of Parliamentarians for East Timor has more than 60 members, from both Houses of the Parliament and from all political parties. This represents about one-third of the total Australian Parliament.

Debate on East Timor is an on-going feature of the Australian Parliament: I have participated in five such debates in the last two years, the most recent of which was on a motion I moved in the House of Representatives on 27 May this year, concerning this year's resolution of the UN Commission on Human Rights on Indonesia. This motion was supported by speakers from both sides of the House. Further, the Human Rights Sub-Committee of the Australian Parliament released an interim report in December 1992 on "A Review of Australia's Efforts to Promote and Protect Human Rights", which featured a significant section on Indonesia and East Timor, particularly on Australia's official responses and actions in the aftermath of the massacre of over one hundred people on 12 November 1991.

To quote from this Report:

> **"Given the situation in East Timor, its proximity to Australia and its historic and emotional ties for many Australians and, in particular, the scale of the massacre on 12 November and the injustices done to the victims of that incident, it would**

seem the incident and its outcome deserved much stronger condemnation. Furthermore, it is important that the Australian Government should be consistent in its reaction to human rights outrages of this kind. Australia has a laudable history of promoting human rights and condemning human rights abuses in distant parts of the world. By softening, as Australia did, the strongly worded resolution on the massacre which was drafted by the European Community, we have lessened our credibility and this, finally, is counterproductive to any future human rights responses we make."

I believe this does sum up the position in which Australia has placed itself, because of inconsistency in the application of the fundamental principles which are the foundation of Australia's foreign policy.

Australia allowed oil and its economic benefits to corrupt our foreign policy and we have further compounded this act in recent years in pursuit of increased trade and investment opportunities in Indonesia.

But Australia is not alone in this desertion of the innocent people of East Timor.

The USA has been an active and benevolent supporter of the Suharto regime for more than twenty years. It sold out the East Timorese in 1975 but still does not have the honesty to openly declare its acceptance of Indonesian hegemony. The Governments of Japan,

Canada and much of Europe are in similar hypocritical situations, actively financing and supporting the expanding Indonesian economy while pretending to espouse human rights concerns.

This is the real challenge for the future effectiveness of the United Nations: its capacity to assert the primary goals of its charter over the economic interests of the leading member states.

Despite the hopes and wishes of the ordinary world citizenry that were raised with the concept of "a new world order", the achievement of peace and freedom for particular peoples is totally reliant on the commitment of major national governments. If their economic interests do not match the human rights goals, little action will be forthcoming.

That is the essence of the dilemma for the East Timorese.

They have no major sponsor who can influence the powerful nations to use their economic pressure on Indonesia. Those powerful nations are too intimately involved in the pursuit of greater financial benefit through the rapidly expanding Indonesian economy.

The U.N. is not able to act independently to uphold its own principles, policies or decisions.

Portugal has in recent years reasserted its responsibility for the welfare of the citizens of its former territory and has renewed its efforts to have the de-colonisation process for East Timor resumed. However, this

re-awakening of Portuguese concern is treated with considerable suspicion and mistrust, by many other member states of the U.N.

Australians, including most strong supporters of freedom and self-determination for East Timor, would **NOT** accept a return of Portuguese administration of the territory, in any form.

Australian Parliamentarians for East Timor support the concept of a UN Administration for a two-three year period prior to a process of self-determination.

At this time, however, even that modest aim is a pipedream.

Indonesia's chains of bondage around East Timor and its people are tighter than ever. Events of the last eighteen months, from the Santa Cruz massacre, to the life sentence for Xanana Gusmao, provide clear evidence of the absolute determination of Indonesia to maintain control of the territory.

I detect little evidence from Australia or any other influential power that any change of heart is likely in their handling of this issue. In fact, the reverse is the case. More nations are seeking to become involved in the rapid economic expansion of Indonesia and they are prepared to ignore its lack of full democracy, its abuse of human rights and the flaws of its judicial system.

There is still widespread political and public support in Australia for the East Timorese struggle. While the flame of hope and determination continues to burn in the hearts of the East Timorese, I and many others will continue our efforts to achieve a just and honest peace. The latest setbacks make us more determined not to give up hope.

Justice, however, will not be achieved for East Timorese on hope alone and unless a major break through of some form or another occurs, the outlook in the immediate future is dim.

However, history demonstrates that justice has a capacity to reassert itself eventually. There are many examples, which demonstrate the capacity of succeeding generations of people to maintain the hopes and aspirations of their parents and grandparents, and achieve their dreams.

I do believe that eventually the Indonesian empire will begin to break down as economic wealth reduces the domination of the military in Indonesian society and a growing powerful and more progressive middle class asserts itself in liberalising the political and civil structures.

It is at that time that East Timor will have the opportunity to regain control over its own affairs and will receive the support of the international community that it currently lacks.

The final question is: will there be any East Timorese left alive in the territory by that time to fulfil this dream?